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Durenberger claims CIA is in disarray, lacks public trust

By Steve Berg
Staff Correspondent

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The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is "disintegrating" because the Reagan administration insists that the agency continue to run a secret war in Nicaragua that is not secret, Sen. Dave Durenberger, R-Minn., said last week.

CIA Director William Casey "has no idea that his agency is going down the tubes," said Durenberger, who, unless he is out-manuevered by a curious mix of his fellow senators, will inherit the chairmanship of the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence when Congress convenes next month. He would be the first Minnesotan to head a full congressional committee in 10 years.

Durenberger's unflattering assessment refers more to poor morale within the spy agency than to its effectiveness, he said. The CIA's visible hand in running the *Contra* fighters in Nicaragua has created "serious morale problems" in an agency designed to operate under cover,

Durenberger said.

Only Casey, and perhaps his top deputy on covert action, are in favor of the CIA continuing to play a lead role in Nicaragua, he said. "The responsible people in the agency don't want anything to do with it."

The senator also warned that public trust in the CIA and other intelligence agencies is beginning to erode, as it did in the mid 1970s after CIA figures became embroiled in Watergate, and after congressional investigators uncovered CIA plots to assassinate world leaders.

"We're getting close to a crisis: trusting Ronald Reagan and his administration in how they use (the CIA)," he said, citing the Lebanon bombings, the harbor minings in Nicaragua, and the issuance of a manual to *Contras* that suggested that government figures be "neutralized."

Durenberger blamed conservative politicians — including President Reagan's national security advisers

— for forcing the CIA into the daylight in Nicaragua, thereby jeopardizing its morale and, to a lesser extent, its effectiveness. The politicizing of the CIA began when Reagan took office and "the right wing began undermining the entire intelligence process," he said.

Durenberger avoided criticizing Reagan directly. He agrees with Reagan's general policy that a Marxist regime in Nicaragua is intolerable, but he disagrees with the CIA's role there.

"I don't expect Ronald Reagan to go to bed every night trying to figure this out. That's why he has advisers that should have been designing some alternative," he said.

Troubles within the CIA have spilled over into Congress, Durenberger said. Oversight — the process by which the secretive intelligence agencies are made accountable to the public — has "broken down" into political bickering and is "dead in the water," Durenberger said. "We started going after each others' throats ... now, we don't do anything."

Durenberger's remarks, in an interview, followed by two weeks his announcement that he would oppose more money for the covert war in Nicaragua. That announcement was meant to warn the administration that it cannot again approach Congress seeking to "sell a disintegrating agency" as a vehicle for either containing or overthrowing the Sandinistas, he said.

Instead, the administration must devise a more creative policy — perhaps above-board military aid or a concerted military effort by other Central American countries.

He invites such an alternative, he said, one that would return the CIA to its primary function of covert intelligence gathering. So far, the ad-

ministration seems not to understand that Congress will not continue to pay for a CIA-led war, he said.

If he becomes chairman, Durenberger said, he and his two closest allies on the committee — Sens. Bill Cohen, R-Maine, and Pat Leahy, D-Vt. — will set out to "get (the CIA and the committee) out of politics and back to overseeing the quality of the production and analysis of intelligence."

Before he can take on the secret world of the CIA, however, he must survive another clandestine and intriguing struggle, this one with colleagues in the privacy of the Senate. For complexity, its plot may be worthy of the best spy literature, the kind in which events are seldom what they seem.

In John LeCarre's famous novel, "Smiley's People," for example, an aging snoop reminds the hero, "It's not a *shooting* war any more, George. It's grey. Half-angels fighting half-devils. No one knows where the lines are."

In the oblique parlance of intelligence, Durenberger is searching for the lines these days. "It's a mess," said a Durenberger aide. "No one knows what's going on for sure."

To begin with, there's a Senate rule. To ensure that senators don't get too chummy with the CIA, five of the 15 members of the intelligence committee must rotate off the panel every two years. Moreover, no senator can serve more than eight consecutive years.

The rotation has never been enforced. But, since the committee is now eight years old, the question arises whether to enforce the eight-year service limit. Enforcing it would push many of seasoned members off the panel at a time when, arguably, the intelligence community is poised on the edge of a crisis in public confidence.

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If the rule is enforced, Durenberger, as the senior remaining Republican, rises to the chair. If it is not, Sen. John Chafee, R-R.I., becomes chairman.

Although a liberal Republican, Chafee has been friendlier toward the CIA's efforts in Nicaragua. He wants a permanent committee or, at least, an extension of the eight-year limit.

Rob Simmons, the committee's staff director, is a Chafee ally. He agrees that inexperienced new members would be a mistake. The rotation rule "will degrade the oversight process," he said.

Durenberger said he will replace Simmons if he assumes the chair.

Add to this a proposal by Sen. Dan Quayle, R-Ind., to dump the current committee and form a joint intelligence committee with the House.

In all this, Durenberger and Chafee each have unlikely allies. Some of the Senate's most conservative members may back Durenberger because they want seats that would open up on the committee. Entrenched members, notably Sen. Daniel P. Moynihan of New York, the ranking Democrat, may back Chafee.

If the matter goes to the Senate floor, Durenberger may have to rely on Democratic votes; thus, perhaps, his hard-line stand against the Reagan administration's use of the CIA. Last week the Democratic caucus supported the rule.

It may not get that far, however. Incoming Majority Leader Robert Dole may simply decide whether to keep the rule and, thus, who will be chairman. Both Durenberger and Chafee backed him for leader. So far, Dole has not tipped his hand.

Neither has the administration, which has given Durenberger no clue as to whether, because of his criticism, it will oppose his aspirations.

Although ultra-conservatives within the administration oppose him, others may have concluded that the CIA war in Nicaragua is a "dead horse," Durenberger said, adding that he doubts the administration will play a strong role in the matter.

"I suspect it has already been decided by realities," Durenberger said. "We've got more important things to argue about."

Dole promised him nothing in exchange for his support for majority leader, Durenberger said, but he "clearly left me with the impression that he was more inclined to let the rule operate."

If Durenberger does take charge of the committee, he proposes to install a "more professional" staff and to steep new members in a more scholarly approach to the historic, cultural and religious backgrounds of the regions most closely watched.

He claimed that he can "work around" the animosity that has developed between many senators and Casey. Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., the outgoing chairman, twice called for Casey's resignation. And Durenberger called Casey a "two on a scale of 10."

Said Allan Goodman, a foreign affairs specialist at Georgetown University, "Oversight is as good as the personal relationship between the committee and the director of Central Intelligence."

On other agenda items, Durenberger said:

■ He favors preemptive strikes against terrorists based on information supplied by U.S. and allied intelligence agencies. CIA agents, however, should not be the killers, he said.

Secretary of State George Shultz has recently proposed such preemptive strikes. The agencies are on a thin line, hoping not to be "pushed over into being a Mossad (the Israeli intelligence agency), where they are actually going out to do the killings in advance," Durenberger said. "... They don't want to be the killers. They don't want to get dragged into that old stuff again. Their job is intelligence gathering," he said.

In many regions, the United States may have to rely on shared intelligence and a multinational anti-terrorist strike force, he said. The CIA may lack the "talent" to penetrate terrorist groups headquartered in the Bekaa valley of Lebanon, for example. "They are much like the Mafia and it's hard to penetrate that kind of a family," he said.

■ He favors retribution against terrorists after their attacks, either by American or allied agents.

Referring to the hijackers who recently diverted a Kuwaiti plane to Iran, he said, "They ought to know

that the minute they step off the airplane, they're marked people. Even if they make it off in Iran, that they may not live out the year, that somebody's going to get them. They know that with the Israelis. But not the Americans. Every one of those idiots (terrorists) has got to know that they don't have a license to kill," he said.

It's clear that the United States is strong in its electronic surveillance of the Soviet Union but needs to place much more emphasis on old-fashioned human espionage in the Third World, he said.

■ That he's unsure whether to insist that the CIA retrace its analysis of the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul. In light of recent evidence that the Soviet Union may have been involved in the plot, some observers have become alarmed that the CIA was quick to agree with the Soviet KGB that it had no part in the attempt.

■ That although he favors a political solution in Nicaragua, those hopes seem to be dimming and military action by surrounding countries against the Sandinistas may be inevitable.

"El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, Costa Rica and Guatemala cannot live with a Cuba stuck in their midst," he said. "And it's a question of time and means before they do something about it."